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SUBJECT: JERUSALEM MEDIA REACTION (02/02): President Abbas said he will respond to Special Envoy Mitchell's proposals on Thursday

Main Stories:

-----The three dailies lead with news on Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas stating during a press conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel in Berlin that the PA will respond Thursday to Special Envoy George Mitchell's proposals for resuming talks with Israel. Abbas reiterated that the PA will resume peace talks with Israel if the latter stops settlement activities for three months and accepts the 1967 borders as the borders of an independent Palestinian state. He emphasized that the cessation of all settlement activity is not a condition, but an obligation under the road map.

In the weekly cabinet meeting yesterday, PA Prime Minister Salam Fayyad condemned the settlers' and soldiers' attacks against Palestinians in the northern West Bank last week. The cabinet called on the international community to exert pressure on Israel to end the crippling siege imposed on the Gaza Strip, enabling the PA to start reconstruction. The cabinet also allocated more than 1,000 dunums (1 million square meters) of land to build on an industrial zone in Jenin as part of the PA's efforts to strengthen the national economy.

The dailies and Maan report that Israeli forces discovered two explosive devices on separate beaches in Ashkelon and Ashdod on Monday. Israel suspects that Hamas is behind this incident.

Independent news agency Maan and Al-Quds report that Fatah Central Committee Member Nabil Sha'ath said on Monday he intends to visit the Gaza Strip without prior approval from Hamas. "My visit to Gaza comes upon a decision by the Fatah Revolutionary Council, and by President Abu Mazen. It is part of the Palestinian homeland, and I won't seek a visa or approval or special permission from anybody,"

he said.

BLOCK QUOTE:

Al-Quds runs an op-ed by Alex Fishman that originally appeared in Israeli daily Yedioth Ahronoth under the title "What To Do With Fayyad?" in which he opines that after Israel's initial treatment of Prime Minister Fayyad as their "Golden Boy," he has amassed more power than Israel ever thought he would. Fishman argues that Israel wanted Fayyad to enact political, economic, and security reforms, but to stop at that. Now Israel is afraid of Fayyad's power, especially in international organizations, and fears that he will convince the UN Security Council to adopt a resolution recognizing an independent Palestinian state on the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital, without negotiations with Israel.

RUBINSTEIN